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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION; HUGO CHAVEZ; EVO MORALES; CHINA; 12/06/07

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Today's most important international stories are related to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's election defeat; Bolivian leader Evo Morales' calling a referendum on his own presidency; and China's economic progress and respect for freedom.

2. OPINION PIECES AND EDITORIALS

- "A Democratic Coup d'Etat"

Daily-of-record "La Nacion" carries an op-ed piece by contributor Natalio Botana, who opines (12/06) "The outcome of last Sunday's constitutional reform referendum has had a bluntness that just a few had imagined...

"... What happened in Misiones repeated itself in Venezuela last Sunday...

"A democratic coup d'etat took place in Venezuela, which was positive for democracy and very different from the perverse attempt of a military coup occurred just a few years ago...

"This is a warning that by no means implies the dusk of the Chavist experience or the immediate reconstruction of a pluralist democracy for all Venezuelans. However, it is a point of departure that we Argentines should carefully observe. In the past, egemonies lasted because election majorities wanted them. Now it seems that the pieces of the structure got rusty. Therefore, hegemony is short-sighted. However, the contradiction between the leaders who dream of this kind of domination and the segments of society that are not willing to support it is a source of polarization and retreats. Learning this lesson is not an easy task."

- "Evo will call for a referendum on his presidency"

Pablo Stefanoni, on special assignment in La Paz for leading "Clarín," comments (12/06) "Used to using surprise as a weapon against his adversaries, Evo Morales surprised Bolivians yesterday with a risky move - in an address to the country, he announced he would submit a draft bill to Congress to call a referendum to decide whether he and nine regional governors should remain in their posts. Six of the country's nine regions are controlled by his opponents

"The coup of effect has been even greater with Hugo Chavez's election defeat still in the air...

"... In this way, the Bolivian President seeks a way out of the deepening political crisis in the country. There is some kind of calculation in the move - while the indigenous president feels sure he will pass the referendum, many governors could be rejected in elections..."

- "The Chinese Connection"

James Neilson, contributor to liberal, English-language "Buenos Aires Herald," writes (12/06) "... China's rise has made democracy less attractive not only by showing that a dictatorship can grow year after year by more than 10 percent but also by enriching authoritarian leaders.

"... The appealing theory that only democracy could ensure economic growth has taken some hard knocks recently, most of which have come from China, whose extraordinary performance has convinced many that dictatorship is compatible with development...

"Though that may be true in the short term, it would be premature to assume that countries can develop beyond a certain stage unless their inhabitants enjoy the freedoms that have been taken for granted in Western countries for many years...

"... China's economic progress owes little to her raw materials or farm products and a great deal to hard work and a traditional respect for education. That is something people in other parts of the world who imagine that somehow or other high commodity prices should be attributed to their own merits are prone to overlook. As for the Chinese themselves they may soon find that their traditional virtues will need to be supplemented with a greater respect for personal freedom if they want their economy to have any chance of catching up with those of the developed West, let alone of overhauling them."

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